

DATE: SEPTEMBER 30, 2020

TO: THE HONORABLE DAN HUBERTY  
CHAIR  
COMMITTEE - PUBLIC EDUCATION COVID-19  
[education@house.texas.gov](mailto:education@house.texas.gov)

RESPONDENT: STEVE MARTIN

*Steve Martin*

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TOMMY MATHEWS



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FOLLOWING - RESPONSE TO:

1. Are Texas public schools ensuring the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff during the 2020 Fall Semester? When applicable, please speak directly to classroom and lab settings, and cafeterias.

**There are several areas requiring an expanded approach, incorporating practical and cost-effective enhancements to ensure the safety and health of the students, faculty, and staff.**

Given the substantial efforts that ISDs have undertaken thus far in the wake of the pandemic it would appear that Texas public schools are working piecemeal in their attempts to ensure the health and safety of students, faculty and staff during the 2020 Fall Semester.

There remains a need to "raise the bar" to achieve a higher standard of care and the creation of objective metrics to measure the accomplishment of that higher standard of care.

During the grace period(s) afforded by Governor Abbott many Texas Independent School Districts have offered in person learning, distance learning or a combination thereof. Given the diversity of our state and the highly dynamic social and political environment of COVID-9, this flexibility has proven to be a reasonable short-term strategy. However, if adopted as the standard protocol for dealing with COVID-19 going forward, it will fragment the Spring Semester. As significant portions of the state's economy and businesses re-opened and parents return to traditional work environments, this short-term strategy will likely prove to be more and more problematic. Options available to families served by schools are varied and are often different across grade levels within the same school system. In the circumstance where a family unit has a combination of elementary, middle and high school students to educate, the non-parity of options seems untenable with respect to a family's (wage earners) efforts to achieve a work-life balance. Moreover, the short-term strategy does not ensure a predictable and projectable at school standard of care or provide a consistent and dependable option capable of providing comfort and care to students, faculty or staff.

It is critical to undertake efforts to verifiably detect and mitigate the COVID-19 viral load in each school and, by doing so, promote the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff while promoting greater levels of certainty and reduced levels of anxiety and stress.

To ensure the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff during the 2020 Fall Semester there must be alternatives to verifiably eliminate the COVID-19 viral loads on the person and clothing of children, faculty and staff when first entering, and re-entering, any school.

At the core of any COVID-19 risk management strategy must be the principles of; (i) Avoid, (ii) Minimize, (iii) Detect, and (iv) Mitigate. School closures during the Spring semester represented an Avoidance strategy. Necessary (although anecdotal) behavioral modifications, such as; student flow protocols, distance mandates, masks, hand washing and surface cleaning protocols represent a combination of Avoidance and Minimization strategies and do nothing to actually Detect and Mitigate COVID-19 viral loads in classrooms, cafeterias, labs, gymnasiums, locker rooms, etc. Over the near and long term, Covid-19 strategies must be expanded to include Detection and Mitigation strategies to promote the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff during the 2020 Fall Semester.

While schools have improved cleaning protocols, there appears to have been little done to scientifically and verifiably track the effectiveness of such protocols, which; if achieved, could lead to the early detection of micro COVID-19 outbreaks (in the air and on surfaces) and, in turn help detect or minimize outbreaks and minimize contagion in students, faculty, staff and extended families in the community.

To maximize the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff during and after the 2020 Fall Semester, schools must pursue a comprehensive and uniform solution to mitigate the COVID-19 viral load. That solution must combine physical facility modifications, utilization of proven COVID-19 detection and mitigation technology, development of affirmative and data-based methods of documenting and tracking the effectiveness of solutions and, the creation of a transparent process through which the general public served by schools can become and remain aware of the effectiveness of such efforts.

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FOLLOWING - RESPONSE TO:

2. What plans are in place for on-campus COVID-19 testing? Do school districts have the capacity to provide testing on campus, both in terms of available supplies and labs to process tests?

**Administrators and staff have no choice but to exercise an abundance of caution.**

**Although a new and abstract concept, in order for a school to be able to Avoid and Minimize an in school COVID-19**

outbreak, the school must have the ability to Detect the presence of COVID-19.

Based on our research, schools have not uniformly initiated temperature testing and have not created a universally available on-site COVID-19 testing capability. Without an institutionalized ability to detect elevated temperatures, it would seem impossible to quickly detect a fever in students, faculty and staff when entering and while on school property, and; in the event of an elevated temperature, discern if the subject has COVID-19, the flu, allergies or simply a common cold.

Without the ability to quickly detect elevated temperatures and confirm the presence of COVID-19 in a student, faculty and staff; each person with an elevated temperature is likely to be treated as a potential COVID-19 case, with the disruption that such a "default" position would impose on all concerned.

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FOLLOWING - RESPONSE TO:

4. What do projected enrollment figures and formula funding look like for this school year?

**Legislative relief is needed in the area of school funding.**

**There are significant COVID-19 related unknowns impacting enrollment and formula funding calculations. Given the uncertainty of COVID-19, schools are not able to reasonably project enrollment figures and formula funding for this school year.**

The aggregate impact of; parents opting to home school, parents opting to enroll in private or charter schools, the inability of schools to anticipate State mandated COVID-19 related school closures or the number of quarantined COVID-19 students during the year renders enrollment figures and formula funding(based on prior school years)virtually impossible.

Unless and until Texas schools have access to, and the ability to fund, a comprehensive and uniform solution to mitigate the COVID-19 viral load that incorporates; physical facility modifications, proven COVID-19 detection and mitigation technology, affirmative and data based documentation of the effectiveness of mitigation solutions and, a transparent and verifiable process through which the general public(families)served by schools can be made aware of the effectiveness of such efforts and schools are able to scientifically detect micro COVID-19 outbreaks (in the air and on surfaces) which; in turn, serves to help prevent or minimize outbreaks and minimize any contagion within student, faculty and staff populations, it will be virtually impossible to stabilize and predict enrollment figures and formula funding.

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FOLLOWING - RESPONSE TO:

5. Has there been a noticeable impact on staff or faculty retention with regard to concerns about the pandemic?

**One can reasonably assume that there are significant COVID-19 related knowns and unknowns impacting staff and faculty retention.**

**The aggregate impact on staff and faculty of; the need to create parallel virtual and in-person course plans, enforcing social distancing, enforcing mask mandates,**



involvement in sanitization protocols, the unpredictability of funding and impacts on operating budgets, increased pressures from student families and, uncertainties from the inability to anticipate COVID-19 outbreaks and school closures has a significant impact on the morale, mental well-being and productivity of staff and faculty which correlates directly to job satisfaction and employee retention.

Staff and faculty retention issues can become even more exacerbated in situations where staff and faculty (as parents and breadwinners) also have a combination of older parents and / or preschool, elementary, middle and high school children to care for, given the overall lack of options in their efforts to manage work-life issues. In such situations, staff and faculty may be forced into a CATCH-22 position where, significant life choices will be made in favor of family causing the staff and faculty to exit the workforce for some period of time.

Unless and until Texas schools have access to, and the ability to fund, a comprehensive and uniform solution to mitigate the COVID-19 viral load that incorporates; physical facility modifications, proven COVID-19 detection and mitigation technology, affirmative and data based documentation of the effectiveness of mitigation solutions and, a transparent and verifiable process through which the general public(families)served by schools can be made aware of the effectiveness of such efforts and schools are able to scientifically detect micro COVID-19 outbreaks (in the air and on surfaces) which; in turn, serves to help prevent or minimize outbreaks and minimize contagion in students, it will be very difficult to stabilize the work force.